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THE JEWS IN MODERN PALESTINE.

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I. THE SEVERAL CLASSES OF JEWS.

THERE are many people, even to-day, who imagine the inhabitants of modern Palestine are Jews, or mostly Jews; on the other hand there are others who consider that the Jewish population is so insignificant as not to be worth reckoning as a factor of importance in the land. Truth as usual lies in the mean. In numbers the Jewish population of the Holy Land is small, but there is no section that figures so largely in importance in the social, religious, and political life; and certainly none so sure to exercise an increasing influence.

At the beginning of the last century the Hebrew element in Palestine numbered not more than 10,000 souls, and these were poor, despised, and downtrodden. Even down to 1874 so good an authority as the editor of Baedeker's *Guide* put down 18,000 as the extreme limit. Twenty years later the same authority put it as 50,000. I venture to say that today it is little, if at all, short of 100,000, and steadily increasing. But even this remarkable increase in numbers is nothing to the great growth of Jewish influence and wealth in the land. The Jewish question is now being pushed vigorously before the attention of the great Christian nations by the members of the fast multiplying Zionist associations; and whatever the ultimate results may be, the immediate result is that the Jews have never had from the Turks such powers and privileges in the land as they have today. Jews (especially eastern ones) and Mohammedans understand each other in many ways better than either of them understand Christians, especially western Christians. Some of the leaders of "Zionism" profess to have come to some understanding with the Sultan which is to pave the way for a "Jewish state" in the not distant

future; and to "Zion" many weary eyes are turned with the light of hope from the squalid ghettos of south-eastern Europe.

In view of this situation, some account of the extraordinary polyglot gathering of Hebrews now in the land, their ways of life, and their customs — especially those of biblical origin, may be of interest.

Early in the last century almost all the Jews of Palestine proper were *Sephardim*, *i. e.*, Spanish-speaking Jews, descendants of those hordes who, rather than renounce their faith, were exiled from Spain in 1492 by the misguided policy of Ferdinand and Isabella. Though so long absent from Spain, a large proportion retain their ancient Spanish tongue; just as in Spain they had to a marked extent, doubtless helped by their contact with the Moors, preserved their oriental traits. The Judeo-Spanish language retains many of the characteristics of the Spanish of four hundred years ago, though largely amplified by Hebrew and Arabic words, and written and printed, of course, in Hebrew letters. In Jerusalem, Hebron, and Jaffa, as well as in many parts of Turkey, it is not only used by all the Sephardim, but is acquired by many Jews and still more Jewesses coming from other parts as a mode of intercommunication. The men almost all know Arabic in addition, and many can speak a certain amount of Hebrew. In Galilee, however, and to the north of Palestine proper, *e. g.*, Damascus and Aleppo, Arabic is usually the only modern language spoken; if a second is known there it will probably be French. The typical Sephardi is thin in face and figure, with good and pronounced features; he has dark hair and eyes, but is not uncommonly reddish blond. He dresses similarly to the natives of Palestine — a fez, a long eastern robe, and slippers.

Closely allied with the Spanish-speaking Jews in questions of ritual, and often too in dress and appearance, are the *Mughrabin* Jews. These also have, many of them, come centuries ago from Spain, but now from the *Mughrib* (an Arabic word, meaning "West"), *i. e.* from north Africa, especially from Morocco and Algiers. These people speak quite a distinct dialect of Arabic from that spoken in Syria. The more educated often know

French ; but many, especially the younger ones, soon pick up Judeo-Spanish. In this class we find some of the poorest, most ignorant, and superstitious of all the Palestinian Jews. In Jerusalem alone they are reckoned to be over two hundred families.

The Syrian Jews from Beirût, Damascus, Aleppo, and, in another group, those from Baghdad and the Euphrates valley, are easily distinguished from the above-mentioned classes ; with a little experience it is even possible to tell a Beirût Jew from a Damascene, and these again from the Halabi (Aleppo Jews), and so on. The last mentioned are sufficiently numerous to form a distinct community of their own. The Jews of this group speak the Arabic of Syria, of course, much better than all others ; many can read and write it, using, however, as a rule Hebrew letters. They are found in all parts of the land ; in Jerusalem alone there are probably more than six hundred families. The Jews of Damascus, about ten thousand in all, belong to this class, but have distinct traits of their own. They claim to be descendants of the garrison which King David placed to keep the city for him!

Another Arabic-speaking class of Jews is the *Yeminite*. As their name implies, they come from southern Arabia and speak an entirely different Arabic from the Syrians. This community has only comparatively recently (some fifteen years ago) invaded the Holy Land, and they are coming in increasing numbers. As they are already Turkish subjects, no difficulties are put in their way, such as surround the foreign Jew who wishes to settle in Palestine. The Yeminites made their first settlement at *Silwân*, the ancient Siloam ; but, although the poorer families still remain there, those who can, migrate to higher and healthier ground. In general appearance and in physique these are very different Hebrews from the other groups. They in all respects closely resemble the Arabs of Arabia — dark skin, black hair and eyes, and spare frames. It may be that they more than any others resemble their forefathers of the Exodus. The cold of Jerusalem tries them very much, and numbers die off from tubercular diseases. Among these Yeminites are several Jews from India, of very similar characteristics.

Very different from these last are the Jews from Tiflis and the neighborhood of the Caucasus, the larger community of whom are known as "*Gourgee*" or *Georgian* Jews. These have made their chief settlement in the Holy Land in the city of Jerusalem, not in the Jewish quarter, but near the Serai (*i. e.*, the government offices), and also just outside the Damascus Gate. When they first arrived they were in the very peculiar and characteristic costume of their former country; men habited like "Circassians" in long coats, ornamented with rows of pockets for cartridges, belted at the waist and extending to the knees, with soldierly bearing, strong, independent, and well developed. They have to a large extent discarded their peculiarities of dress, but still speak among themselves their language, "Georgian." They are the most hospitable and friendly of all the Jewish communities. Closely allied with these are immigrants from Daghestan, whom we call usually *Kurdi*, Jews speaking still another language. They are much fewer in numbers. Like the last, they are Russian subjects.

Another group of Jews under Russian protection have, within the last ten years or so, settled in Jerusalem in increasing numbers — the *Bokhara* Jews, from Bokhara and Samarkand in central Asia. They are the richest of all communities; and their houses, on a hill to the north of the city, are a great advance on the miserable hovels which are being erected by other communities. Physically they are a splendidly developed set of men, tall and broad, tending as life goes on, to portliness. The rabbis dress most becomingly in long gray robes, with rough Astrakhan caps, and long close-fitting boots; while the women, except those who all too soon have adopted the clothes of the land, wear picturesque loose robes of most fantastic hues. Many of their houses are furnished with taste, especially in respect of carpets. They speak a language of their own, but communicate with their brethren of the house of Israel through Hebrew, which many speak fluently.

It is impossible to do more than to mention some of the other small communities — the Ajame Jews from Persia, speaking Persian; the Jews of Orfa and Armenia; Jews from India,

Singapore and Straits settlements. China, etc. These all, with the Sephardim, go to make up what one may call "Eastern Jews."

It remains to say a little about the great group of *Ashkenazim* or western Jews, who form so large a proportion of the Jews of the world, and nowadays more than half that of Palestine. They are those we come in contact with in northern Europe (Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, France, and England), and in America. Most people when they speak of "Jews" mean Ashkenazim. In Palestine it is only in the second quarter of the last century that they obtained a firm footing;[1] and it is, more than anything else, their "return" during the closing quarter of the nineteenth century that has swelled the Jewish population to its present dimensions.

This class all speak a language known as "Yiddish," or Judeo-German — a language the basis of which is old German, but which in every part of Europe receives so many added words as to make it almost a distinct dialect. Thus in Poland numbers of Polish words are added; in Russia, Russian words, etc. Wherever spoken, a large but variable proportion of Hebrew is thrown in. Though called Judeo-*German*, it differs so much in grammatical construction, in pronunciation and in vocabulary from modern German as to make it unintelligible, when spoken by a Russian or Polish Jew, to most Germans.

In physique, and even to a large extent in habits of life, the Ashkenaz Jew — the product of long years of oppression, poverty, and unsanitary surroundings — is a great contrast to all the classes mentioned above. When, however, we would criticise him too severely, we must pause to consider that what he is "Christian" Europe has made him by long centuries of harassing persecutions. He has been made to "move on" again and again; and when he could be moved no farther, he has been cribbed up in a narrow "pale" in which no chance for development either of body or of mind has been possible. Under-

[1] They were banished in 1721, and their buildings confiscated. In 1832 they were allowed to return, and in 1836 they had their large synagogue restored to them — or rather its ruins, from which they built their present large one.

sized, anæmic, unwashed, uncombed, he seems to have little but his faith; yet through this he triumphs over all circumstances. By hundreds, year by year, do the old men creep out of the "pale," and come to Palestine to spend the few years, or months, left to them in study and prayer, and to lay at last their weary bones at rest on holy soil.

Two great sects of Ashkenazim are represented in Jerusalem. The orthodox — the *Perushim* or Pharisees, and the *Chassidim*, a sect which branched off some two hundred years ago, but now in tenets not far removed from the original stock. Both are extremely strict in the keeping of all Talmudic precepts. They are the great opposers of all progress; and, as will be seen, they have strong weapons in their hands to fight back the incoming tide.

Two small groups, isolated from even those they claim as brethren, and entirely alien to Christianity and Mohammedanism, must be mentioned before we leave this part of the subject. These are the *Kareites* and the *Samaritans*. The former, the Kareites, form a very small community, living in one block of houses in the Jewish quarter. They have been called the "Protestants of Judaism," and this name may fairly represent one aspect of their life. They are treated by the rest of the Jews very much as a small community of Protestants amidst a great population of ultra-bigoted Roman Catholics would be. The sect was founded by Ana ben David in the second half of the seventh century, and his idea appears to have been to give a different interpretation (though on parallel lines) to all the difficulties of the law from that given in the Talmudic books. During the many centuries since then, their views have much changed, and they are said to cling more to the Old Testament than to the sacred traditions. Their home is in the Crimea, and it is said by some Jewish writers that they are descendants of the "Khozours," a non-Semitic race which was converted to Judaism. At one time they were much more numerous in Palestine, especially at Damascus, where a large cemetery — once theirs — is their only memorial. But the Kareites in Jerusalem say that some of their grandfathers came from Damascus, as the result of a divine intimation to settle in the Holy City.

Closely allied in position, but of much more historical interest, is the small and sole surviving community of Samaritans at *Nablûs*, the ancient Shechem. They number less than two hundred souls; and, considering the close intermarriage that must now go on, it is wonderful that they do not disappear by a process of natural extinction. This interesting community cannot be more than mentioned here. If they were to receive the attention they deserve, because of their unique history and customs, they would need an article to themselves.[2]

From the description already given it will be noticed that the Jews of Jerusalem speak many languages and dialects. Judeo-German, Judeo-Spanish, and Arabic (in the three quite distinct dialects, Syrian, Mughrabin, and Yemin) are the common ones; but English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Georgian, Persian, as well as languages used in central Asia and in India, are all in common daily use in the homes of Jews. Among the more educated men, Hebrew is a means of intercommunication common to all classes.

More striking than the differences in language, dress, and even social customs (though in the last they have, as I shall show later, a wonderful amount in common) is the marvelous difference in physical characteristics. It is a thing which has not yet received a satisfactory explanation, but there is no doubt that all classes of Jews have picked up the main physical characteristics of the people among whom they have long dwelt. In whatever dress may be worn, it is possible to pick out the class to which the Jew belongs. In general build, in facial features, in shape of head, the type has been in every land profoundly modified. The typical Semitic type, as seen in the pure Arab, is only today seen in the Yemin Jew, where it is marked. The Russian Jew and the Russian Christian peasant, the Gourgee Jew and the Circassian Mohammedan, the Morocco Jew and the Mughrabee Arab, all show undoubted physical resemblances. In every case, when the residence has been for many generations, this modification has occurred. It has been maintained

[2] A recent account of their Passover celebration appeared in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, January, 1902.

that this is due to intermarriage, and that the boasted purity of the Hebrew stock is a myth. This is, I think, a mistake. Intermarriage has occurred and does occur. I know at Jerusalem some jet-black negro boys who have been *born* Jews, their negress mothers being proselytes. But there is no evidence that, at any rate for many centuries past, any great number of Gentile women have desired to renounce their religion and to ally themselves with the persecuted and despised race. Rather in food, climate, altitude, and general meteorological conditions must we look for the influences that have molded these many types.

II. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE JEWS.

There are six great centers of Jews in Palestine: Jaffa, Damascus, and the four "holy cities"—Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias. These last two are not so evidently "holy" as the cities of biblical history; their sanctity is connected with the rise of the Talmud in the case of Tiberias,[3] and with ancient schools for Talmudic interpretation in the case of Safed. Tiberias was once an "unclean" city, forbidden to the Jews because built (it was said) over ancient tombs; but when, after their being expelled from Jerusalem, Galilee became the great stronghold of orthodox Jews, Tiberias came into prominence. The rise of Safed to the position of a "holy city" is wrapped in mystery. It is not a scripture site; it has no very interesting associations; it is not clear why Jews came to choose it, unless, perhaps, for its wide outlook over the sea of Galilee and the Promised Land. In the sixteenth century, three centuries after it was first inhabited by Jews, it became the home of a series of great students of the Talmud, who, by means of a printing press, widely spread the fame of their seat of learning; and ever since it has been a favorite resort of the orthodox, only second in sanctity to Jerusalem itself. It is claimed that the Messiah is

[3] The Sanhedrin, after several removes, came to Tiberias about the middle of the second century A. D., under the celebrated Rabbi Judah Hakkodesh; and from this time Tiberias was the central point of Jewish learning for several centuries. It was here that both the Mishna and the Gemara were compiled. *Memorials of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, Vol. I, p. 417.

to rise from the lake of Galilee and raise his victorious standard at Safed.[4]

In these six cities Jews chiefly congregate. The Damascus Jews are a class by themselves. Arabic-speaking, hard-working, not over-orthodox or religious, they claim none of the special merit of dwellers in the "Holy Land," for their city is outside its boundaries. Jaffa is the landing place of newcomers, some of whom seem to get no farther. It is, too, a great commercial center. But to live in Jaffa is not like living in a genuine "holy city." In Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed a large quarter of the city is set apart for the Jews; in the last two it is the larger portion, and in every instance it is the poorest and the dirtiest. In Jerusalem the Jews spread out on all sides. Formerly they had but their own quarter within the city walls, but now they have greatly expanded their quarter, extending it far into the Moslem district. They have also planted settlements in all directions outside the walls of the city. These settlements must not be confused with the agricultural colonies. They are simply groups of houses built compactly together, and usually constructed each by some special society. A settlement manages its own affairs by a council of the heads of the community living there. The groups of buildings are of various design, the majority being of one-storied buildings and arranged with little regard to convenience of approach, sanitary conditions, or beauty. These settlements extend for over a mile on each side of the Jerusalem-Jaffa road, also along the Damascus road, and between these two lines. In fact, except on the east side, these "colonies" lie all around Jerusalem. They receive fanciful names, such as Mêo-Shirem ("the Hundred Gates"), Ohel-Moshé, "Montifioreh" (after Sir Moses Montifiore), etc.

One particularly poor Jewish settlement, about a mile up the Jerusalem-Jaffa road, has largely constructed its buildings out of the large tin cans and the wooden casings in which coal oil is shipped into Palestine, mainly from Russia; the settlement is, therefore, facetiously called by some of us the "Box Colony." The best laid out settlement is that of the Bokharaleyeh Jews on

[4] In the Talmud this city is called Tzephath.

a hill to the north of the city. Here the main streets were marked out first, and the houses, many of them really well built structures of two stories, were added as needed. There are few fine buildings which are distinctively Jewish. In Jerusalem there is one fine Sephardim synagogue, and there are two large Ashkenazim synagogues. There are also two unpretentious Jewish hospitals. Outside the walls there is a fine public library; also some large school buildings and two hospitals, one of the latter built by Rothschild, and the other a really fine, handsome structure, known as *Shaare-Zedek*, on the Jaffa road, and opened only last year (1902). A very large proportion of the Jewish dwellings in all the cities are unsanitary, ill ventilated, without sunshine, and often even without light. Many of those inside the walls of the city are underground and always damp. Large families inhabit one single room day and night. The streets in such quarters are narrow, ill-paved, and wretchedly filthy.

Besides those in the large towns there are Jews scattered all over the land. Along the coast from Gaza to Beirût they are found in considerable numbers. Much of the business of the country, especially the exporting of grain, is in their hands. Not only in towns, but everywhere in the villages, one comes across Jews. They may be keepers of the village store, or itinerant tailors, cobblers, tinkers, or hawkers who pass from village to village supplying the simple needs of the fellahin. Even east of the Jordan, among the Bedouins, Jews may be found negotiating purchases of grain for Damascus and elsewhere.

Then, lastly, there are the now not inconsiderable number of Jews who within recent years have been settled in the various "agricultural colonies" which are located here and there through the land. Of these I shall write in a later paper.

All the Jews in the land are under the jurisdiction of the "*Chacham Bashe*," or chief rabbi of Jerusalem, who is appointed by the sultan and has the same powers over his fellow-religionists as the patriarchs of the various eastern churches have over theirs. He is responsible for collecting the taxes and for handing them in to the Turkish treasury. He has to settle all disputes between his people, and has power to decide all questions of property

where only Jews are concerned. Of course, he must be a Turkish subject, and so far he has always been a Sephardi Jew; but the Ashkenazim, who are now in the majority, have long been trying to get one of their number appointed to the post. They have their own chief rabbi, but he has no political status. Every community has its head rabbi, and each large community—for instance, Hebron, Tiberias, Safed, and Damascus—has its own chief rabbi, who has to be recognized by the Porte before he can exercise his powers. To obtain one of these offices in a "holy city" is considered a great ambition for a pious Jew. The present chief rabbi of Hebron is a student who has spent the greater part of half a century in Odessa, and has published many large and doubtless learned books; yet he considers the onerous and worrying duties of his position well compensated by the honor it confers on his closing years.

A large proportion of Jews are Turkish subjects, and the number of such is increasing. The children of those who themselves were born in the country lose their foreign protection under ordinary circumstances, and many others forfeit it voluntarily by refusing to serve in the army of their native land and in other ways.